

PRU, Inclusion and Attendance Service

Targeting Support Meetings – School Advice

The following frequently asked questions are designed to provide guidance for schools relate to Targeting Support Meetings which the Local Authority School Attendance Support Team (known as the PRU, Inclusion & Attendance Service – PIAS, in Kent) must facilitate with all schools.

Q: What is a Targeting Support Meeting (TSM) and what does the DfE guidance specifically expect the local authority / PIAS to do?

A: These may also be referred to as ‘termly conversations.’ The DfE [Working together to improve school attendance](#) guidance expects all LAs to:

Organise termly TSMs with each school in their area so the school’s attendance leads and their point of contact in the local authority’s School Attendance Support Team can identify, discuss, and agree joint targeted actions for pupils who are persistently or severely absent and those at risk of becoming so. This should include agreeing what support the LA will provide and which (if any) other statutory or voluntary services should become involved.

Use TSMs to build strong relationships and work collaboratively with the school’s attendance leads, including providing advice on recording in the register, accessing services or the wider area-wide attendance approach.

The TSM may also include helping a school to identify areas to focus on in their school policies or approaches where they seek it. This may include help with analysing their own data, comparing themselves to other schools in the geographical area or considering how they may learn from or work with other schools who have faced similar patterns or trends.

Q: Is there a statutory requirement for PIAS to hold TSMs with our school?

A: No. The DfE attendance guidance remains non-statutory and an announcement from the DfE when it will become statutory is pending, which will be beyond September 2023. However, PIAS will continue to adhere to the expectations laid out in the [Summary table of responsibilities for school attendance](#) as if it was already statutory and schools are encouraged to take the same approach so that any transition to a statutory framework is as seamless as possible.

Q: Are all schools entitled to participate with the TSM process?

A: Yes. PIAS must facilitate TSMs with all types of schools including primary, secondary, special, PRU, independent and independent special. The same support must be offered by PIAS irrespective of whether the school is maintained, academy or a free school.

Q: Who should represent the school at a TSM?

A: A senior member of school staff is expected to attend the meeting. Their specific role may be dependent on the size and type of school, and it does not have to be the headteacher unless they are the designated lead for attendance there. Schools may like another staff member present who deals with more day-to-day tasks such as the Attendance Officer, Family Liaison Officer, or Pastoral Lead as they may have more detailed information about individual families. Schools may wish to invite a member of the governing board who has an interest or specific role around attendance.

Q: How often must TSMs be held?

A: The DfE attendance guidance states these termly conversations must take place three times per academic year at minimum, i.e., once per old / seasonal term.

Q: Who should lead or chair the TSM?

A: The named PIAS Officer for the school is expected to facilitate the meeting. This does not mean PIAS is expected to pick up all the actions agreed. The DfE has been very clear that TSM's are not audits or inspections of schools and PIAS is not there to challenge practice. The main goal of TSMs is for LAs and schools to work together to help find ways to improve attendance so the process should feel like the school and LA are on equal terms.

Q: Do schools need to request TSMs via the Digital Front Door (DFD)?

A: No. There is no form for schools to be able to book a TSM on the Digital Front Door on the Kelsi website because schools are entitled to one on a termly basis anyway. The school's link PIAS Officer should schedule the next TSM at the end of the current TSM, and ensure one is held each old term. Booking well in advance will hopefully help to secure the availability of the people who need to be present from PIAS and school.

Q: Should TSM's be held face to face or virtually?

A: Where possible meetings should always be in person on site. Virtual meetings may be preferable where staffing capacity means face to face visits are impractical, but face to face should be the default approach and the link PIAS Officer should always follow the school's preference. PIAS Officers may sometimes suggest virtual meetings to manage the commitment of visiting 20 to 30 schools on a termly basis.

Q: Can our school request more than one TSM per term (i.e., more than 3 per academic year)?

A: Unfortunately, due to the finite resources in PIAS and an expectation to visit every school over the course of a term this is not possible. However the school can contact their link PIAS Officer as and when required to seek advice or make referrals via the [Digital Front Door](#) on Kelsi. The PIAS team also facilitates attendance network meetings each term for groups of schools to join where guidance updates are shared, key themes discussed, external guest speakers present about their service, and an opportunity for schools to share good practice to improve attendance.

Q: Our school buys in the services of an external organisation to manage pupil attendance. Do we need to hold Targeting Support Meetings with PIAS?

A: Yes. The Department for Education has stated that all local authorities are expected to provide four core functions to all schools free of charge, one of which is Targeting Support Meetings, therefore schools are expected to participate in the process. A representative from the external organisation can be present at TSMs, but a senior member of school staff is expected to be present.

Q: Our school is part of a Trust, and we have several schools locally whereby we feel it would be easier to discuss all the schools in one Targeting Support Meeting at one of the sites. Is this possible?

A: Yes. However, the Department for Education advises that TSMs should be held at each school so that local issues are discussed which may vary from one school in the Trust to another. The most suitable and effective arrangement should be discussed

PRU, Inclusion and Attendance Service

between the school/Trust and the link PIAS Officer. Where possible PIAS will aim to have one single PIAS Officer link across all the schools in the Trust.

Q: Our school has a TSM scheduled with our link PIAS Officer but the senior member of staff due to attend is now unavailable. Should we go ahead?

A: There is a probability this will happen as Senior Leaders may have other commitments to balance, and it is advised that the PIAS Officer is alerted as soon as practicable so that the meeting can be rearranged. PIAS Officers will always be keen to have the presence of a member of SLT as this is a commitment expected by the DfE of schools, therefore agreeing an alternative date is recommended, especially as TSMs are only three times per year.

Q: Our school has been part of several TSMs, and we feel we can manage them on our own without local authority involvement. Can we do this?

A: The expectation is TSMs are always held between schools and PIAS. Although the local authority cannot enforce that TSMs are held with LA staff as they are not mandatory, we believe there are real benefits from working together to improve school attendance which is the title of the DfE guidance. If you have concerns about the TSM process, please contact your link PIAS Officer in the first instance.

Q: For how long should a typical TSM run?

A: There is no exact time as every school will be different in terms of structure, size, systems and challenges with their cohorts, however we would predict most TSMs on average should last no longer than one hour to 90 minutes. Duration may decrease as time goes by and the process becomes more refined, although much will depend on a range of variable factors.

Q: What preparation should our school make before a TSM?

A: Schools may wish to run reports from their management information system (e.g., SIMS, Bromcom or Arbor) in advance of the TSM and go through individual pupils to look at those which they may wish to raise with their link PIAS Officer. It would also be helpful to be able to share overall school attendance and how many persistent and severe absentees are on roll at that time.

Q: Does every pupil at risk of persistent absence, persistently absent and severely absent need to be discussed at a TSM?

A: No. This would be time consuming and not necessary. The focus should always be on the severe absence cohort of pupils to ensure there is a plan which involves the local authority, but some pupils will be known to other services, or the school has good justification not to discuss them as there is no role for the LA.

Q: Should our school or link PIAS Officer be completing a form to note any conversations or actions during a TSM?

A: PIAS has designed a template which has been designed for schools to use as a guide for TSMs and to trigger general conversations, which may include the school aligning to DfE guidance, the use of data to look at absence trends, and to generate actions for the school and/or local authority. Schools may wish to use their own template, and this should be the property of the school which has an overall expectation to manage attendance of their pupils as set out in DfE guidance. A copy of whichever form is used should be given to the PIAS Officer as a record of the visit and so they have details of any actions they need to take.

Q: Should details of individual pupil attendance be given to our link PIAS Officer to take away at the end of the TSM or sent on at a later point?

A: No. Any decisions or actions for individual pupils should be held within school, unless those pupils are open referral to PIAS (e.g., under a statutory attendance referral, a child missing education, or where a PIAS Officer has been invited to a formal attendance meeting via the Digital Front Door. PIAS Officers can also be supplied with attendance data for individual pupils open to Early Help, Social Care or SEN department due to KCC having a data sharing agreement. Information for any other pupil must not be provided and PIAS Officers will not ask for it as there is no facility to store it on KCC systems or storage locations. Lists of pupil names on a SIMS report for example, should only be made available to view during the TSM.

Q: Our school has a TSM scheduled for next week, but we do not wish to share individual pupil data with PIAS. Can we refuse?

A: Yes. Any school may refuse to share names of individual children, their attendance percentage, and codes as well as details about the circumstances, especially as some information may be highly confidential. However, in terms of numbers, there are various references to data sharing with LAs throughout the guidance. Sharing data will help to determine the level of advice and guidance the school may need and the DfE is currently developing data sharing systems which may eventually replace the census. As an alternative the school may wish to share general data around specific cohorts such as SEN, FSM, EAL and GRT. The TSM process is very much geared towards helping schools to improve attendance for individual pupils and there may be a role for PIAS or other local authority services where barriers to attendance are beyond school gates.

Q: *Our link PIAS Officer is visiting school next week and we would like them to join us on the school gates to monitor punctuality as well as join some parent meetings after our TSM. Can I request this extra support?*

A: Due to the staffing resources and extra responsibilities for local authorities outlined in the DfE attendance guidance we will regrettably only be offering TSMs to schools and unable to participate in other activities such as early/late gates, projects with groups of pupils and assemblies. PIAS Officers will only be able to join formal attendance meetings where invites have been made via the Digital Front Door, or where there is a case already open to PIAS. If you would like more information about when PIAS staff can attend meetings in school, please speak to your link PIAS Officer.

Q: *Can we provide any feedback to PIAS about our TSMs?*

A: Yes, we have designed an [evaluation form](#) for schools to use if they wish to provide comments to help identify ways to continuously improve the TSM process.

Q: *Which parts of the DfE attendance guidance refer to TSM's?*

A: Paragraphs 40, 46, 67, 72, 73 – 75, and 79. The document below embedded in this guide should also be read in conjunction with the main DfE attendance guidance.



DfE fact sheet -
TSM.pdf

If you have any additional queries which are not answered in this document, then please speak to your link PIAS Officer. If you do not know who this is you can find their details on Kelsi [here](#).